INTRODUCTION

I am honoured to be here and to interact with the mandarins in the public service. You as senior managers are the cream of South Africa’s public service. You are the team that contributes to the transformation trajectory in South Africa. The Senior Management Service (SMS) is not a team of managers who take government business forward in a business as usual approach, we need to through the Senior Management Service see a convergence of SMS members that ensure that we are able to deliver services in the manner required to the people of the country and the region. I welcome you to the 7th Senior Management Service Conference.
This SMS conference is particularly poignant at this important juncture of our country’s history as we move towards our third national democratic election and the celebration of our fifteen years of democracy. In our quest to make democracy and freedom from economic oppression and poverty a reality, we have had to ensure an accountable government whose public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights with due regard for the rule of law. Our democracy is characterised by participation, transparency, responsiveness, consensus, equity, inclusiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. We have uncompromisingly improved all facets of governance, public administration and management. But I would like to challenge you as to whether public institutions are working as constitutionally expected? Have you as SMS members delivered on the People’s contract for a better life for all? We have to continuously reflect on what is working and what is not. Let me remind you that we formally launched the SMS initiative and the first SMS conference in 2002, with the theme “Moving the Public Service from Policy to Implementation”. This conference dealt extensively with the issues of e-Government with particular focus on cost effective ways of improving service delivery for the benefit of the citizenry.

This year’s conference, of which the theme is “Delivering on the People’s Contract through a Seamless Public Service” is a culmination of the debates of the 2nd SMS conference, hosted here in PE in 2003, of which the theme was “Towards an Integrated Public Service”. We are therefore concretising and putting into action the
issues raised during that conference. A number of SMS conferences that followed thereafter, focused on building capacity for sustainable development in a developmental state which South Africa is striving to achieve. During last year’s SMS conference we consulted you on the Leadership Development Management Strategic Framework (LDMSF), which I will be launching later this evening during the gala dinner. The LDMSF, is a response to the SMS Review that was done in 2005 and the past SMS conferences of capacity development. This is to say that the SMS conferences are not just mere talk shops but robust debates that culminate into something concrete and therefore you must be part of those robust discussions.

We also become deeply introspective, critically reviewing the State of our nation and the capability of our State in having delivered on the People’s Contract promise of “a better life for all”.

The topic that I’ve selected, ‘Strengthening the three spheres of government through a seamless (single) public service,’ is one which intent goes to the centre of this debate. It is most opportune because it gives us a chance to reflect on the capability of the State in meeting its developmental objectives, and taking stock on how the State through its government machinery, encompassing all three spheres of government, can be strengthened in order to do things better in the method of ‘Business Unusual’. Public administration and management, human resource management and development, organisational structuring and development are critical areas in which all of you are involved in to ensure that the basic public services are taken to the people who need them most. We have introduced
certain strategies and mechanisms to achieve the tenets of our democracy as articulated above. Thusong Centres, Community Development Workers, Izimbizo, the “Know Your Service Rights” campaign, and Batho Pele Principles are some of our community outreach strategies. The Anti-Corruption strategy, which requires SMS members to be custodians and implementers thereof, will enhance our rating in the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). We have achieved more in a few (15) years than the previous government. Let us therefore not go back but strive to put South Africa on the map of the world’s envy and be proud to protect our democracy and our beloved country’s achievements.

Let me argue for a move toward a Single Public Service (SPS) as a vehicle and a mechanism that will strengthen the three spheres of government. Before I do that, it is important to understand the socio-political context that informs Government’s approach.

POLITICAL IMPERATIVES

In 1955 at Kliptown, the African National Congress (ANC) spearheaded the adoption of the Freedom Charter, which reflected our commitment to create an equal and just society. Hardly 50 years later, government has built a democratic society in which all South Africans have the right to vote, to live where they wish, to move freely around the country, enjoying a wide range of natural rights and
freedoms. Since 1994, the government has strived to build a "Developmental State".

In this vein, the 51st Conference held in Stellenbosch in 2002 expressed the view that: "we seek to build a developmental State, capable of implementing the objectives of our national democratic revolution, including the creation of a better life for all, addressing the legacy of apartheid, colonialism and patriarchy, and acting as the driving force for socio-economic transformation; and (that) the State as the key instrument for the delivery of basic services should develop appropriate systems and structures in order to facilitate sustainable service delivery machinery." Among the resolutions taken under this heading were:

- To continue strengthening, developing and refining the system of intergovernmental relations between the three spheres of government that has evolved;

- The pace of transformation be accelerated through the creation of a single development-oriented integrated system of public administration; and,

- That the move towards a Single Public Service should not be seen as an administrative process, and should incorporate the move towards integrated service delivery including single service access points for citizens. This will result in greater access to services for rural communities.
The ANC’s 2004 Election Manifesto, *The People’s Contract*, makes a call for the establishment of a common system of public services. This common system, a Single Public Service, is a key objective of government because ultimately it is about *the way in which the spheres and structures work together* within a framework of integration in particular areas to achieve developmental goals as a coherent whole. Initially the development of the Single Public Service required the harmonisation of conditions of service between the public service and local government, but it will ultimately find expression in overarching framework legislation that will establish common norms and standards for public administration.

The 52nd ANC Conference, in Polokwane, re-affirmed the decisions regarding the Single Public Service, recognising that "one of the most pervasive challenges facing our country as a developmental State is … best addressed through a concerted effort by government in all spheres to work together and to integrate as far as possible their actions in the provision of services, the alleviation of poverty and the development of the people and the country."

THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE AND INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

It is clear from the above that improving the *performance* of the State is central to meeting national socio-economic objectives and building a better life for all. On the one hand, this must involve
substantially increasing the coherence of the State to ensure better co-ordination of efforts in the delivery of services across the three spheres. On the other hand, it also means building government institutions across the three spheres which are centres of excellence, robust and flexible enough to respond to different needs and contexts as well as ensuring sufficient capable human and other capacity.

As government we are unapologetic that we are in the process of building a developmental state which is pro-poor and intervenes decisively and coherently in the economy and society to address social and economic goals. It is seen as an appropriate vehicle to overcome the large social and economic backlogs we have inherited over centuries of illegitimate and unconstitutional rule and to ensure a sustainable future for all South Africans.

Our Constitution requires cooperative and effective government while recognising that government in the national, provincial and local spheres is “distinctive, interdependent and interrelated” (section 40(1)). Together the three spheres of government are required to provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for our country. This requires that the spheres respect each other’s territory and powers and functions while striving to work together in a meaningful way to improve service delivery to the public.

The drive towards coordinated government has been at the heart of government’s transformation and reform programmes for the last ten
years. In 1998, the Presidential Review Commission advised government that coordination at the centre of government was weak, and that intergovernmental relations needed to be improved. As a result government reconfigured its Cabinet committees to facilitate coordination in particular sectors, namely the governance, economic, social, justice and international clusters. Similar clusters of Directors-General were created. These measures supported a horizontal integration among national departments.

To complement this horizontal integration, a system of vertical integration was developed by the establishment of a framework for national, provincial and local governments to promote and facilitate intergovernmental relations, which is regulated in the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005 (Act No. 13 of 2005).

Despite the positive changes that have been introduced over the last ten years, there is room for improvement in public service delivery. Government does not present itself as a coordinated front, but in many instances as a myriad of national, regional, provincial and municipal offices, each with a separate identity, each operating in its own silo. The lack of coordination between the different spheres of government has hindered service delivery with people often being forced to visit more than one office or make multiple visits in respect of a single service. People are often expected to travel great distances to obtain the services they need. Most services are available only during office hours forcing people to interact with
government during their productive time. It is not just a burden on the people; it is a duplication and bureaucratisation of resources.

Integration of government services, systems and personnel would assist in addressing these challenges. This is a massive task, requiring extensive change throughout public administration and encompassing a change in mindset as much as legislative and institutional change. A people-centred administration is envisaged that permits, or may require, public service employees from different branches of the administration to work together to find creative solutions to the service delivery challenges bedeviling us. In order to better coordinate service delivery and to motivate staff, it is essential to remove the unjustifiable disparities that continue to exist between employees in the public administration.

Most importantly, the evolution of a developmental State is dependent upon the commitment, strength and competence of those public servants who must convert the stated developmental goals into coherent programmes. We therefore require a capable and effective Public Service to implement its national development plan.

Looking ahead, the ongoing transformation of the State in line with the imperatives for a Single Public Service will require bolder action to ensure greater coherence between the different spheres of government in the delivery of services.

INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY
Research has shown that many people have difficulty accessing government services, often because transport costs are prohibitive. Some people are not even aware of the benefits and services to which they are entitled. To respond to these challenges, it is necessary that government organises itself in such a way that as many government services are concentrated in a single location, and that the single location be as close to the people as possible.

From the citizen’s perspective, the State is constitutionally bound to ensure that services are in fact delivered to the citizens and, that these are of a high quality and delivered to their convenience. This challenges the State to find the most effective methods and channels to deliver these services within the system of government. It calls for a decisive break-out from the old fashioned ‘single department, single service, single service point’ model of service delivery toward a dynamic, modern delivery model and system that begins to cluster these services, to the convenience of the citizen, through a ‘single window’ be this a physical structure or in the net. Many people would argue that illiterate citizens would not be able to benefit from this but that is why we have established Thusong Centres that have facilitators that would ensure that there is service delivery. In this respect, the institutions across the three spheres that comprise the machinery of State have to be strategically aligned and harmonized to complement one another so as to more effectively fulfill the needs of SA society. Such arrangements will enhance government’s service delivery approach as one sovereign entity, rather than conceived as separate institutions serving the people.
An example of integrated service delivery is the Thusong Service Centres (formally known as MPCCs). These centres deliver services of all the spheres of government, from a single location. They are located in townships and rural areas, close to communities which have previously been marginalised. The establishment of the centres gives rise to the need for cooperative institutional arrangements. For instance, officials staffing these centres will in time need to take responsibility for delivering services other than those of their immediate department. Another important requirement is a streamlined financing mechanism for jointly run service delivery initiatives such as this which is currently not in place.

Plans are underway to establish urban government service delivery malls to complement the Thusong Service Centre initiative. Integrated service delivery centres such as these have been established in the State of Bahia in Brazil and over the past two years in Canada. They offer a one-stop service in a pleasant, professional environment with flexible hours of business and well-trained staff. Such innovations in service delivery will be facilitated by institutional integration, especially between and amongst the spheres of government.

To strengthen work that has been done in this area and to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clarified, a regulatory framework has been provided for in the Public Administration and Management Bill which will require the determination of a framework for service
centres across the country as sites for the delivery of services across the spheres of government to enhance accessibility, convenience and effectiveness of services.

Given the potential for integration offered by information and communication technologies, it may in future be possible to apply for an ID book at a clinic, or to pay your traffic fine at a supermarket. Globally, the technology already exists for many of these innovations and there have been isolated breakthroughs in the public and private sectors.

**MOBILITY OF STAFF**

One of the strongest arguments for a SPS is the facilitation of mobility between the institutions of government. Greater mobility facilitates the transfer of functions between spheres, to allow services to be delivered at the most appropriate level, and also enables the deployment of managers to where they are most needed in government.

Numerous complications have arisen in transferring personnel between the spheres. The conditions of service in the public service and local government are significantly different. This makes the transfer of staff very complex, given that overall conditions of service must be retained. Add to this the fact that transferring employees are likely to have to resign from their pension funds, to their detriment, and may have to join a different medical aid. Their union might not be represented in the bargaining council of the sphere to which they
have moved. Two strategies must be employed. Firstly, mechanisms must be found in the short term to make the transfers easier within the existing constraints. Secondly, conditions of service must be harmonised as far as possible to ensure mobility. This is a central objective of the Single Public Service.

ATTITUDES AND PROFESSIONAL ETHOS

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once commented that civil servants are neither civil nor are they servants of the public. This view is supported by several government and independent reports which point out that government institutions are not citizen-friendly and that the Batho Pele principles are not implemented correctly.

Perhaps this is attributable to a sense that some public servants in service delivery institutions do not take pride in their work. It may also in part be based on the outdated view that jobs in the public service are guaranteed for life.

One of Batho Pele’s principles is that the State should interact with citizens but many public servants still treat citizens as if they are doing them a favour. Changing this attitude requires a change in the mindset of public servants but it is also necessary to transform the material conditions under which people work. Many public servants are expected to work in workplaces that are drab and depressing, impacting negatively on their morale.
IN CONCLUSION

The Senior Management Service Conference should not become a platform to lament on the challenges but to ensure it becomes a professional establishment that looks into addressing these challenges, the Senior Management Service must make the fundamental changes required.

The Senior Management Service cadreship must lead the seamless service delivery required by our nation. The mandarins must be able and willing to make the changes required and to be a government institution that represents and is responsive to the needs of the people of South Africa.

As we consider these challenges we must remind ourselves that the transformation of our country is not negotiable and our engagement must always reflect our commitment to the social contract we have with the people of South Africa.

Let us transform ourselves to ensure that we serve the people of South Africa, rather than expecting the people to transform themselves so that we can serve them.

Thank you for the opportunity, let’s ensure that the Senior Management Service rises to challenges as required.

I thank you.